



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Department of Psychology

# When the Stars Align: Managing Behavior-Based Interventions in a Workplace Academic Unit



**Nelson P. Miller, J.D.**  
**Professor and Assoc. Dean Emeritus**  
WMU Cooley Law School

Workplaces challenge reform efforts to improve productivity and outcomes. While not unique in this respect, academic workplaces, especially those in higher education, present special challenges in getting faculty members to accept needed reforms, given faculty members' high expertise and academic-freedom-based independence. This presentation, data-based in part, summarizes insights from a three-year research-lab-supported project implementing successful behavior-based reforms at one unit of a multi-unit organization. The reforms raised the unit's critical outcome, graduate passage of a licensing exam, well above the organization's other units. Passing a licensing exam is the organization's primary validated outcome, the statistics for which it confirms as reliable for accreditation purposes. Under the positive influence of the project's organizational-management initiative, half of the unit's faculty members volunteered to participate in the reforms, and their participation further induced reforms by non-participating faculty members in the same unit. The project eschewed managing by policy and mandate in favor of recognition reinforcement, supportive change context, participant control and choice, evidenced-based practices, and knowledge showcasing. The project focused participants on the behaviors that they wished to induce and on measuring those behaviors, while fostering team approaches within a unit culture that inoculated participants against adverse conditions imposed centrally across the organization.

**Friday, Sep. 6, 2019**

**2 p.m.**

**1720 Chemistry**



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Department of Psychology